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ABSTRACT

This document, which is based on information gathered during a 1998 study of how study circle programs contribute to community problem solving, presents best practices for producing community-wide study circles. The best practices are illustrated through stories that are grouped into five sections on the following themes: (1) creating a broad-based, diverse organizing culture; (2) recruiting, training, and supporting a diverse group of facilitators; (3) recruiting participants who reflect the community's diversity; (4) contributing to change, particularly in the area of race; and (5) linking dialogue with action. Each section includes lists of best practices from experienced programs, tips, narratives, case studies, and community profiles. Selected best practices discussed in the booklet are as follows: (1) make the coalition as diverse as possible from the very beginning; (2) use both traditional and community-based leaders as members, and build a coalition that includes leaders with vision, resources and connections, administrative savvy, and promotional and marketing skills; (3) capitalize on all kinds of friendships and affiliations; (4) cultivate partnerships with the news media; (5) practice careful administration; (6) give every organizational partner a clear job to do; and (7) pick topics carefully and promote circles in a way that suggests an expectation of community and institutional change. Information about the research team's members is appended. (MN)

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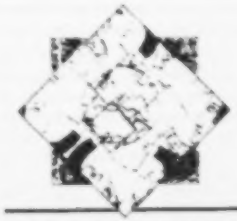
Best Practices

. or Producing Community-wide Study Circles

What Works: Study Circles in the Real World



BEST PRACTICES
FOR PRODUCING
COMMUNITY-WIDE
STUDY CIRCLES

What Works:

Study Circles in the Real World

Adapted by Gloria Mengual
from a report of the same name written by Rona Roberts
of Roberts & Kay, Inc., Lexington, Kentucky.

What Works is based on
Toward Competent Communities: Best Practices for Producing Community-Wide Study Circles,
the result of a two-year research project.

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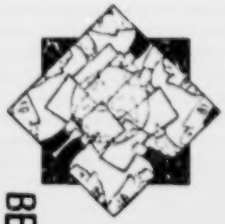

Introduction

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The Best Practices Study

In July 1998, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation offered a grant to the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., sponsor of the Study Circles Resource Center, to conduct a study aimed at understanding more about how study circle programs contribute to community problem solving, particularly with regard to improving race relations, and to identify and highlight the best practices organizers have developed to produce successful community-wide study circle programs. The study took place from September 1, 1998, through September 1, 2000. Topsfield engaged Roberts & Kay, Inc., to conduct the study. The complete report is posted at www.studycircles.org, the web site of the Study Circles Resource Center.

Five years ago, the Study Circles Resource Center embarked on a journey to learn about how study circle programs contribute to community problem solving. We published the extensive research findings in a thick report, *Toward Competent Communities: Best Practices for Producing Community-Wide Study Circles.* (It is available on our web site at **www.studycircles.org**.)

The ultimate purpose of the "Best Practices" study was to identify the lessons that would be useful to people doing the real work in the field. With that goal in mind, we offer this unique booklet that condenses a lot of research into an easy-to-read format.

The 1998-2000 Best Practices study focused on 17 community-wide study circle programs that did a good job with some aspect of organizing and carrying out rounds of study circles. Most of the programs addressed racism and race relations. These programs have seen many changes since the study concluded. Some have grown. Some have adapted to address new community issues. Some have concluded their study circles for the present time. In some communities, people have moved on.

Yet the lessons we learned stand today. We continue to apply them to our work with people organizing study circle programs in their communities, neighborhoods, and schools. We hope these lessons give you fresh ideas and inspiration for your work.

How To Use this Booklet

Treat this booklet as a menu with stories scattered throughout. The lessons are arranged in five sections, each based on an important best practices theme. The sections include lists, tips, narratives, case studies, and community profiles. Read and use the pieces that meet your need — in any order that makes sense to you.

A note about names, numbers and statistics: The information about study circle programs was current in 2000. Names and statistics may have changed since then. Please contact the Study Circles Resource Center to learn more about these programs today. All population figures in this booklet are from the 2000 Census.

Please see **www.studycircles.org** to read full profiles about the programs in each of these learning sites.

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The Best Practices Learning Sites

Alread, Arkansas

Aurora, Illinois

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Decatur, Georgia

Fayetteville, North Carolina

Fort Myers, Florida

Hartford, Connecticut

Inglewood, California

Lima, Ohio

Maine

New Castle County, Delaware

North Little Rock, Arkansas

Oklahoma

Springfield, Illinois

Syracuse, New York

Twin Cities (St. Paul and Minneapolis), Minnesota

Woodridge, Illinois

A few definitions

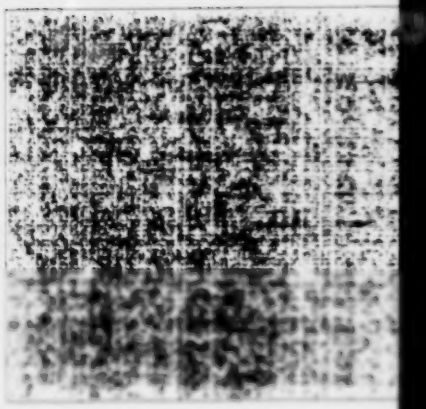
A study circle is...

A small, diverse group of 8-to-12 participants who meet for about two hours weekly for four to six weeks to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way.

Led by a neutral facilitator, people consider the issue from many points of view while the discussion progresses from a session on personal experience of the issue, to sessions that examine many points of view on the issue, to a session that considers strategies for action and change.

A community-wide program is...

Organized by a diverse coalition that reflects the whole community. It includes a large number of participants from all walks of like, uses easy-to-use nonpartisan discussion materials and trained facilitators who reflect the community's diversity. It results in specific opportunities to move to action when the study circles conclude.



I. Creating a Broad-based, Diverse Organizing Coalition

Best Practices from Experienced Programs:

1. Make the coalition as diverse as possible from the very beginning. Particularly make sure it reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of your community.

2. Using both traditional and community-based leaders as members, build a coalition that includes four types of leaders.
   Leaders with:
   - ♦ Vision
   - ♦ Resources and connections
   - ♦ Administrative savvy
   - ♦ Promotional and marketing skills

3. Assess the need to change the coalition as your program changes.

Programs that incorporated some of these best practices are profiled at the end of this section: Colorado Springs, Colorado; Fayetteville, North Carolina; Lima, Ohio; Syracuse, New York.

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Who Makes Up the Coalition

Key Leaders

Central Organizing Body

Community Partners/Sponsors

- **Key Leaders**
  Circle initiators with extensive responsibilities
- **Central Organizing Body**
  Board, steering committee, planning groups with significant responsibilities
- **Community Partners/Sponsors**
  Circle collaborators, allies, funders with limited and very specific responsibilities

Why Diversity in the Coalition Matters

From the very beginning of the program, it is important for the organizing coalition to reflect the diversity of the community. A diverse coalition can attract a more diverse group of facilitators and participants, and its decisions are more likely to be sound and workable because it reflects a wider range of community-based knowledge and experience. Finally, because they model the principles of inclusion and openness, diverse coalitions help to establish the credibility of the study circle program.

Case Study:

Building Coalition Diversity from the Start

Jon Abercrombie talks about Decatur, Georgia

Jon Abercrombie, a European-American man who lives in Decatur, Georgia, has worked for the past 25 years to strengthen urban neighborhoods. He is the head of Common Focus, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing resources for community building. Jon initiated study circles in Decatur, where they are known as roundtables.

Issues Needing to be Addressed

- ◊ School System Controversy — contentious school board elections
- ◊ Issue between Private College and its Neighbors — a zoning battle over a parking deck built by Agnes Scott College in the middle of a residential neighborhood
- ◊ Reverse "White Flight" — newcomers purchased "fixer uppers" at moderate costs, then renovated and resold them for large amounts, leading to accelerating property values and taxes that most longtime residents could not afford to pay

"I remember people moved to Decatur in the '90s specifically for the diversity it offered. Nine years later, Decatur seemed ripe for both conflict, and for the health that a colorfully diverse community can produce.

I decided to meet with key leaders in inventory-like conversations to discuss ways we might move forward. One of my initial conversations was with Elizabeth Wilson, mayor at that time, who had resided in Decatur for 30 years. Elizabeth, an African-American leader,

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supported the idea and recommended we hire Harriet Alston, a longtime resident of Decatur, to personally recruit participants from diverse backgrounds to participate in the roundtables. I realized Elizabeth's decision to give the approach a try was a significant action.

The mayor, city manager, city marketing administrator, a member of city council, a manager in the city planning department, and others worked closely with me on securing resources and organizing the effort. This connection with key leadership helped bring study circles to our community.

The approach to organizing was unfamiliar to us, but we moved ahead in a timely manner, building a coalition of folks to develop criteria for what we really wanted for Decatur.

I was fortunate to find Amani Bedford-Coleman, who had moved to Decatur without a job just when we needed administrative assistance. We moved ahead within a short time frame to plan. We recognized the importance of different elements of the situation (broad community involvement across races, multiple sites, etc.), and presented an approach novel to most community leaders. Our success was built by hundreds of volunteers who made calls, facilitated discussions, hauled chairs, made cookies, and did mailings to make the process successful.

Strengths of Diverse Coalition Leaders in Decatur

Mayor Elizabeth Wilson
Her decision to give the approach a try was a significant action.

Longtime Resident Harriet Alston
Her ability to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds provided a key element toward ensuring success.

Mayor, City Manager, City Marketing Administrator, City Council Member, City Planning Manager
Involving key leadership helped secure resources, organize the effort, and ensure successful implementation of study circles.

Administrative Assistant Amani Bedford-Coleman
Her organizational skills expedited our efforts to frame the plan.

Organizational Structures For Coalitions

Effective coalitions have produced study circles within a variety of different organizational structures. Organizing communities should decide what will be easiest and most workable.

In each case noted in the box on this page, organizers used local knowledge of what would work best when they decided on the organizational structure. Its nature did not seem to have much impact on the quality or effectiveness of a particular study circle program's work. One exception: Intentionally short-term coalitions were not likely to build permanent structures in support of action efforts.

- **Temporary Coalitions**
  People in Alread, Arkansas, and Oklahoma built temporary coalitions and organized study circles without paid staff. Organizers in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and North Little Rock, Arkansas, built temporary coalitions and paid temporary staff.
- **Permanent Coalitions**
  Organizers in Lima, Ohio, formed a loosely structured coalition and sustained it over several years. The program, which produced significant numbers of study circles, was usually assisted by one person and partly funded by the city of Lima.
- **Independent, Tax-exempt, Nonprofit Organizations**
  Programs in Aurora, Illinois, and Fort Myers, Florida, formed independent organizations and carefully selected, diverse boards, along with some paid staff.
- **Part of a Larger Organization**
  Because the study circle programs help further the mission of existing, larger host organizations in Syracuse, New York, and New Castle County, Delaware, they devote paid staff time to study circle work.
- **Appointed Governmental Bodies**
  The Race Relations Task Force in Springfield, Illinois, guides and responds to study circles there. In Fayetteville, North Carolina, the Human Relations Commission constitutes part of the organizational structure for study circles.

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Who Takes The Lead?

Each community's habits and traditions affect how its citizens accomplish change and who takes the lead in community change efforts.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Different Approaches

Taking the Lead:

1. Government

   Strength: The mayor or other high-ranking official championing study circles boosts publicity and promotion and may provide significant funding and other resources.
   Weakness: When coalition members leave everything to government, it weakens the effort and may depend too heavily on one key person. A change in government leadership (i.e., new mayor) may diminish the program, or it may not be sustained.

2. Businesses and Corporations

   Strength: Corporate resources can add much to what a coalition can do with promotion and events.
   Weakness: Programs led by businesses and corporations need to put extra effort into recruiting from the grass roots to ensure broad-based participation.

3. Faith Communities or Nonprofits

   Strength: Faith communities or nonprofits provide access to likely volunteers and study circle participants and may also have a history of collaborating on other ventures.
   Weakness: Access to and partnering with private sector leaders, along with finding funding for a study circle effort, may be more difficult.

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Pilot Rounds: Key to Building Diverse, Strong Coalitions

◇ **Orient to Process/Potential**
Pilot rounds help beginning coalition members learn about study circles by experiencing what they are and what they can do firsthand.

◇ **Enhance Recruitment Efforts**
Coalition members who complete study circles typically become more enthusiastic and knowledgeable promoters of study circles.

◇ **Help Identify the Topic**
Pilot rounds can also help coalition members determine the most appropriate study circle topic for their community-wide round.

Using The Coalition to Prevent Organizer "Burnout"

Coalitions can play a crucial role in making the work of the central organizer manageable and sustainable. Programs that rely too heavily on one central organizer's volunteer contributions often find that the organizer's efforts cannot be sustained beyond a few rounds of study circles. The solution? Share the work.

Organizer-suggested strategies:

◇ During coalition meetings, develop a list of all work to be done.

◇ Coalition members should share the most time-consuming, least glamorous and most detailed work: arranging study circles, facilitator training and support, handling extensive promotion /marketing responsibilities, arranging for food, child care, transportation, etc.

◇ Raise money to fund at least some of the central organizer's work.

◇ After the central organizer has already completed at least two rounds and is beginning to work on a third, ask what other people could do to help, and find others to accomplish those tasks.

◇ If the central organizer is paid staff, create a flexible work schedule to give the organizer a break.

◇ If the central organizer has successfully coordinated several rounds of study circles, increase her or his salary, or raise funds for a significant bonus.

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Colorado Springs, Colorado

Community Conversations on Race

Local community activists organized Community Conversations on Race (CCR) as a one-year project to address racial intolerance in Colorado Springs. Beginning in 1998, two rounds of study circles attracted a total of 675 participants, nearly 50 percent of whom were people of color. The steering committee reflected striking diversity, including representatives from the Black Coalition of Concerned Citizens, Pikes Peak Community College, the Black Chamber, and *The Gazette* (the daily newspaper). Organizers also garnered support from more than 80 participating organizations that focus on diversity or serve one or more minority communities. These community partners provided endorsements, meeting space, funds, and other resources. While CCR disbanded after one year, two other local community organizations continued to provide people with opportunities for dialogue and follow-up work on the issues raised during the study circles.

Fayetteville, North Carolina

Fayetteville Study Circles

In 1998, government, business, and organizational leaders in Fayetteville initiated a study circle effort to enable people to talk openly about race in a new way. The city manager brought about a dialogue between the African-American president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the European-American president of the Chamber of Commerce, which led to the establishment of Fayetteville United — a racially diverse group of community leaders committed to finding ways to improve race relations in the community. Fayetteville United joined with the Human Rights Commission to organize a round of study circles on race, with over 300 people taking part. As one demonstration of their commitment to follow up on participants' specific recommendations, organizers have now conducted study circles on race with young people.

Lima, Ohio

Lima Study Circles

As the pioneer of the community-wide study circle model, Lima began its program in 1992 under the leadership of the Mayor's Office, Ohio State University/Lima, and local churches in response to local disturbances resulting from the Rodney King verdict. The strategic pairing of congregations (black and white) enabled organizers to create racially balanced groups. In the early years of the program, more than 1,000 people from 47 faith communities participated in multiple rounds of study circles on the topic of race. The program expanded to include people in local businesses, neighborhood associations, and schools, bringing the total number of participants to over 4,000 by mid-1999. Since 1995, people in Lima have also participated in study circles on the topics of violence and youth issues.

Syracuse, New York

Community Wide Dialogue on Ending Racism, Improving Race Relations, and Beginning Racial Healing

Study circles began in Syracuse in 1996 as a program of the InterReligious Council (IRC). The first round addressed this question: "What kind of community do we want for our children and how do we make it happen?" Because participants in this round consistently identified the negative impact of racism on children's futures, the IRC decided to create and sponsor work that deals directly with several aspects of race. The study circle program is overseen by the Advisory Committee of the IRC whose members are recruited purposefully to ensure diversity and different types of leadership. Both the staff and the Advisory Committee have racially mixed, joint leadership. By 2000, some 750 people in Syracuse had participated in study circles aimed at ending racism, improving race relations, and beginning racial healing; study circles have been offered steadily throughout the year since 1998.

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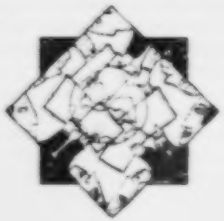

II. Recruiting, Training, and Supporting a Diverse Group of Facilitators

Best Practices from Experienced Programs:

1. Recruit intentionally for wide diversity in the facilitator pool. Form diverse co-facilitator teams.

2. Provide excellent, ample facilitator training, with additional specialized training for groups who will address race or facilitate action planning and decision making.

3. Provide facilitators with support and opportunities to continue learning.

Programs that incorporated some of these best practices are profiled at the end of this section: Springfield, Illinois, and the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota.

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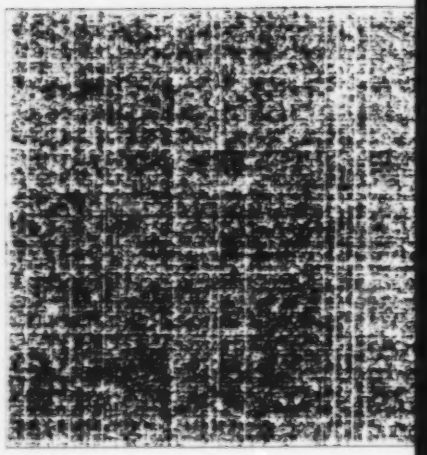
Develop Supportive Activities for Facilitators

Examples from Best Practices Learning Sites

To increase the likelihood that facilitators would do their work well, organizers in some communities developed supportive activities beyond training (before, during, and after study circles). They:

- Created a support team of professional trainers whom facilitators could call to discuss problems experienced in their study circles.
- Created a free-net computer communication system for facilitators to use among themselves.
- Developed a biweekly group for facilitators to share stories about their study circles and how the work personally affected them.



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Case Study:

Training Facilitators for Dialogue about Race

Bob Blackwell talks about Springfield, Illinois

"I guess in terms of training facilitators, the first thing that I thought about was making sure we got people who had experience, both in terms of working in race-based groups, and also some general group experience.

Bob Blackwell, an African-American man, is president of Ujima Management Consultants in Springfield, Illinois. He serves as leader of a diverse team of study circle facilitator trainers.

The other part had to do with familiarity. I would think just about the chemistry of the training team.

As we talked about trying to get to the basic facilitation skills, what seemed very obvious is that there needed to be some sort of rehearsal. The issue of race in our society is complex, it's full of conflict, it's stressful for individuals. You know, it's full of a lot of emotions. And we needed to prepare the facilitators. Emotionally charged people were coming to the sessions with a lot of questions, a lot of baggage. Your responsibility as a facilitator was to allow that emotion to get on the table as a viewpoint, without anybody attacking it — and some of it was worth attacking — and work it to some sort of meaningful conclusion.

Another thing I think is key to study circles is a personal philosophy — if you believe that putting people together who are very different than one another can result in something constructive, then at some point you just have to let it fly. We tried to communicate that these skills, these techniques are helpful. But you may not be able to employ any or all of these. You have to let the group dynamics happen, and have faith that in working with the group, they'll reach meaningful outcomes.

Part of our role is [saying to facilitators], you can do this. You don't have to do it alone. Use your group. You're responsible for guiding the process, not the outcome. The group is responsible for that."

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Train Facilitators to Deal with Emotional Race Discussions

Work emotionally charged viewpoints to a meaningful conclusion.

Air differing viewpoints.

Let group dynamics happen.

Guide the process, not the outcome.

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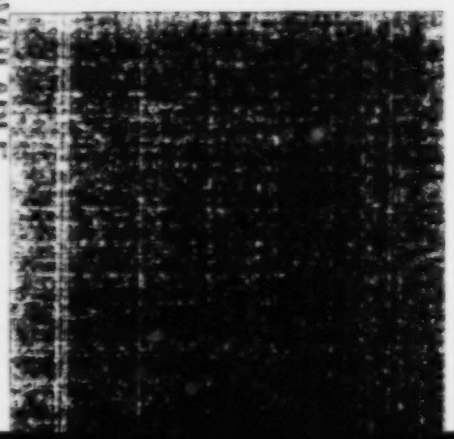


Enhance Circle Discussions, Outreach, and Training

Examples from Best Practices Learning Sites

In some communities, experienced facilitators have become involved in study circles in ways that go beyond facilitating sessions. That benefits programs in many ways:

To make their discussion guides more pertinent to their communities, Twin Cities, Minnesota, facilitators helped rewrite the discussion guide and revamp facilitator training.

At the Hartford Stage Company in Hartford, Connecticut, study circle facilitators guided 30-minute audience conversations following 36 performances of *Dutchman*, a provocative play about racial divisions. This effort increased public awareness of the Community Conversations on Race in Hartford.

In Decatur, Georgia, study circle organizers involved facilitators in selecting materials and training other facilitators. Facilitators and site coordinators also used feedback from end-of-session evaluations to suggest study circle session improvements to organizers.

Between each study circle session in Alread, Arkansas, facilitators combined and organized each group's results and mailed packets to every participant as a starting point for the upcoming session.

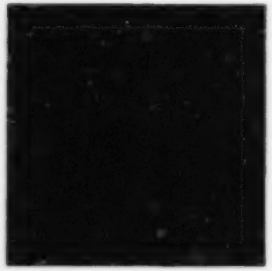
Involving Youth as Facilitators

Organizers who work with young people as facilitators report that facilitating comes naturally to many of them. They enjoy facilitating and many learn the skills quickly. The experience is good for youth, both immediately and in the future. Communities benefit as well:

- ◇ The Roundtable Center in Maine sponsored a three-year program that trained 566 young people to serve as facilitators for study circles in which 4,555 young people participated. The youth chose their own topics and conducted study circles with typically hard-to-access groups, such as youth in a detention center and recent immigrants.
- ◇ Training and serving as facilitators engages young people more powerfully in considering issues and developing civic skills than would simple participation.
- ◇ Some programs pair young people and adults to facilitate study circles.

Challenges Facilitators of Color May Face

Facilitators of color in several communities reported a series of special challenges that may arise when facilitating study circles on race:

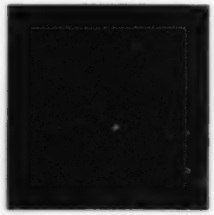


- ◇ ***Challenge:*** In many study circles on race, European Americans may be talking about race for the first time. They lack understanding and can be defensive. They may say and do things that are highly provoking to a facilitator of color.

  Antidote: Some facilitators of color reported participating in facilitator peer groups or becoming participants in other study circles so they could express their own views outside the study circle they facilitated.

- ◇ ***Challenge:*** Sometimes a facilitator of color may be one of the only people of color present during a study circle. The facilitator can feel torn, recognizing that for a worthwhile conversation, the group needs additional perspectives from people of color, yet participating would breach the facilitator's neutral role.

  Antidote: Some facilitators say this dilemma has no real solution. One approach is to think in terms of balance rather than strict neutrality. Ask the group's permission to change roles briefly (as long as this happens infrequently, and always in the presence of a co-facilitator who continues in a neutral role).



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Community profiles

Springfield, Illinois

Springfield Community-Wide Study Circles Program on Race Relations

Sensing race-based tension surrounding national events and local issues, in 1997 the mayor and other leaders in Springfield began developing a study circle program. The goal was to facilitate interaction, and give citizens an opportunity to help develop a plan to address the city's needs in the area of race relations. From 1998 to 2000, almost 500 people participated. Committed to providing quality facilitation, organizers engaged a diverse team of four facilitator trainers who specialize in facilitating groups working on the issue of race, and who are known in the community for their activism on issues of racial equity.

Responsibility for organizing the study circles program has shifted from the primary sponsorship of city government to a Race Relations Task Force — a group formed at the suggestion of study circle participants to review action ideas coming out of the study circles. In April of 2001, Springfield launched another round to help residents address race-related issues.

Twin Cities:
Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota

Community Circle Collaborative

In 1998, the Education and Housing Equity Project joined forces with the Amherst Wilder Foundation in St. Paul to promote the idea and experience of metropolitan citizenship. The collaboration is based on the two partners' mutual commitment to boosting citizen engagement in addressing the tough, interwoven problems of segregation and racial injustice as they impact on schools, housing, student achievement, and communities. Working with other community partners, the Community Circle Collaborative sponsored 80 study circles on the focal issues over three years, with approximately 1,200 people participating.

The program was strengthened by the involvement of professional facilitators who served as civic partners in the effort, designing and delivering a facilitator training program, and recruiting facilitators from their own memberships. Members of professional facilitator networks also helped rewrite the discussion guide to promote more thoughtful, reflective conversation.

III. Recruiting Participants Who Reflect the Community's Diversity

Best Practices from Experienced Programs:

1. Capitalize on all kinds of friendships and affiliations:
   - Group members recruit fellow members.
   - Leaders speak about the value of study circles to constituents.
   - Coalition members recruit colleagues, friends, and family.
2. Cultivate partnerships with news media.
3. Plan and carry out high-profile, large events.
4. Practice careful administration.

Programs that incorporated some of these best practices are profiled at the end of this section: Alread, Arkansas; Aurora, Illinois; the state of Maine, and New Castle County, Delaware.

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Capitalizing on Affiliations

Recruitment Goal: Reaching beyond the "choir"

- People in many study circle programs worry that they reach only those who are already interested. With persistence, multiple approaches to recruitment, and dedication to reaching usually excluded groups, programs can recruit beyond the "choir."
- First, appreciate the special qualities of the "choir." People who help with community issues are invaluable. Acknowledge them. Involve them in recruitment and promotion efforts. Avoid making them feel that they are "not enough."
- Identify groups of people or types of people who rarely participate in community decision making. Identify leaders and communication opportunities among these groups. Get to know their leaders, develop an understanding of their interests, and build working relationships with them. Invite them to participate in the coalition, as well as in pilot rounds or sample study circles so they can have direct experience.
- Ask each member of the coalition to vouch for study circles one-on-one with people from their communities of affiliation (i.e., neighborhoods, people of a similar racial or ethnic group, or people who share a commitment to a particular issue or advocacy arena).
- Rely on one-on-one recruitment to involve leaders of usually overlooked groups and to move further into the ranks and recruit others from these groups.
- After the round of study circles is over, communicate directly and often with the people from the usually overlooked groups who participated. Make sure they know about change initiatives and results produced by their round.

Faith Communities: A key resource in study circle recruitment

- Congregations are filled with people interested in the community issues addressed by study circles.
- Both the receptiveness of congregations and most faith organizations' structures make them good partners in study circle coalitions.
- Many congregations have valuable study circle resources — particularly space, study circle participant recruitment, and potential youth and adult leadership (i.e., facilitators, coalition members).
- Faith communities in Syracuse, New York, and Lima, Ohio, study circle programs have played a major role in organizing and sustaining study circles on race and related issues.
- Because of the racial homogeneity of most faith communities, congregational pairing — for example, linking predominantly European-American with predominantly African-American congregations — can boost diversity. Lima, Ohio, pioneered this model; programs in Aurora, Illinois, and Fayetteville, North Carolina, used this approach on a smaller scale.

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Case Study:

Recruiting Participants in a Community of 400 People

Ron Harder talks about Alread, Arkansas

Ron Harder is a European-American man who led the study circle effort in Alread, Arkansas. Ron is a craftsman who was chair of the school board when the first round of study circles took place in Alread in 1998. These are excerpts from a journal he kept during that round.

"My original concept was to recruit leaders from the community who would in turn recruit more volunteers from their areas of influence. In Alread there is a great deal of overlap in those areas, as well as a limited number of organizations (mostly very small) to tap into. I went door to door trying to recruit people to come to our organizational meeting. I was totally sold on the idea of study circles.

It became fairly obvious early on that people were willing to come to our organizational meeting, but were not willing to recruit others. At this time I was using the ballpark figure of 50 people in my recruiting speech. Many were skeptical.

I handed out a list of names I had gathered in the Alread district (I went through the Clinton phone book and then mentally drove the streets to come up with the list) and asked everyone to contact anyone they thought might be interested in participating. I stressed that we did not want anyone to feel excluded and that if the same person was asked by enough different people they might have to give in and say, "Yes." I also put forth the theory that there might be a critical mass where it would be more important to be part of study circles than not to participate. By the time 17 of us left Alread to go to Little Rock for our facilitator training, there were 65 people signed up for the circles. The addition of the faculty and the students put our participant count at about 95, a fourth of the town's population.

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Media Leaders and Their Partnerships with Study Circles

Too few people believe that anyone in a position of authority is genuinely interested in listening to their thoughts. One reason that the circles were so successful in Alread is that the participants learned that not only were the leaders interested in their opinions, but also that meaningful discussion was possible between even the most unlikely mix of individuals. Problems and/or issues that once seemed to be non-negotiable were revisited and all of a sudden the world went from, "It can't be done," to, "Anything is possible."

Mike Chapin and Jeannine Guttman talk about Aurora, Illinois, and Portland, Maine

Mike Chapin: Personally I thought it was a very significant experience, and what I've done is require all my editors and photographers and reporters to go through it. I made a decision: Forget about a raise unless you go through study circles. It's an expectation. You have all year to get there. Every single one of them did.

We went from being embarrassingly ignorant at times to at least being sensitive. I'm not saying we hit the mark all the time now, but we are largely a white newsroom and not integrated enough with all the cultures in the community to be accurate and fair all the time. And I've found that since I put my staff through study circles, my own perception is that we are doing a better job. And I think the perception in the community is that we are doing a better job telling people about the various cultures and ethnicities and that sort of thing, and not being blinded to it by our own culture. It's the elimination of the knee-jerk reaction to somebody else's life.

Mike Chapin, a European-American man, is the managing editor of *The Beacon News* in Aurora, Illinois. He has been a major partner and supporter of Aurora Community Study Circles.

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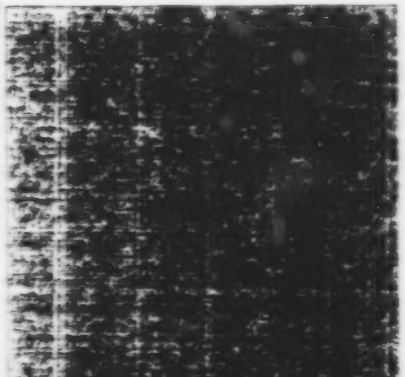

Jeannine Guttman, a European-American woman, is editor and vice president of the *Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram*. The newspaper has sponsored a number of Reader Roundtables in Maine and has provided many other forms of support for civic dialogue.

Jeannine Guttman: Most papers are very purposeful in their mission. They are cognizant of their role in democracy. They are showing people ways to get involved. This creates the "front porch." I think over time study circles and reader councils can help the credibility of the media. We are widening the net of what constitutes news.

There's this incredible sense of fairness and strength of character in the American public. People know how complex issues are — they are tough, and there are all these moving parts. By the same token, there is distrust of the easy answers. Papers bear witness to the dialogue process. Otherwise it only happens in living rooms. The magic newspapers bring is reporting on them. We give voice to those conversations.

"There's this incredible sense of fairness and strength of character in the American public. People know how complex issues are — they are tough..."

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High-profile, Large Kickoff Events

Examples from Best Practices Learning Sites:

Kickoff events create visibility, credibility, attention, and focus for study circle programs. Good kickoff events attract broad participation, inform people about study circles, and help persuade people that study circles are a worthwhile investment of time and effort.

New Castle County, Delaware, organizers linked their big kickoff events to significant national observances (i.e., Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, the YWCA Week without Violence, and the National Day of Commitment to End Hatred). In different years, the New Castle County events presented Maya Angelou, Cornel West, an interfaith clergy panel, and the Rev. Bernice King.

At these events, organizers usually conducted a mock study circle to give the audience a flavor of what to expect.

Aurora, Illinois, organizers kicked off a round of study circles during Week Without Violence each year. During the same week in the fall of 1999, the YWCA Week Without Violence, the Red Ribbon Week Task Force, and a Character Counts program all collaborated to draw attention to their programs.

Twin Cities, Minnesota, organizers held kickoff events and information meetings for sponsors at major public institutions. The events highlighted notable, publicly visible community leaders, including people who had experienced study circles.

Syracuse, New York, organizers created an innovative kickoff series to recruit participants and partners. A kickoff breakfast coupled with neighborhood-based meetings introduced study circles and recruited participants to sign up for them. In addition to breakfast, which was held in a central location, organizers decided to hold neighborhood kickoffs on four different evenings during the same week to give those who could not attend the breakfast a chance to hear about the Community Wide Dialogues. Organizers conducted one-hour sample dialogue circles for more than 225 people at these meetings.

Organizers in Decatur, Georgia, uniquely used their kickoff event not only to attract participants but also to form diverse study circle groups. Organizers arranged the kickoff so that people sat with the study circle group to which they had initially been assigned. Then organizers asked all the participants to stand up, look around the room to see if there was a group that did not have their perspective represented, and if so, join that group.

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Keys to Maintaining Commitment and Participation

Ways to Keep Participation in Study Circles from Dwindling

◊ **Confident, well-trained facilitators make a difference.**

In Syracuse, New York, where volunteer facilitators participate in 12 to 15 hours of training, some study circles had perfect attendance.

◊ **Focusing on action from the beginning can help.**

People in Decatur, Georgia, knew that their study circles would give them a way to participate in the city's important strategic planning process.

◊ **Personal attention makes a difference.**

In Aurora, Illinois, some facilitators and organizers called participants who missed a session to express concern and invite them to return.

Appealing to Diverse Groups and Reducing Participation Barriers

Organizers made decisions and took actions that increased participant recruitment from throughout the community. Examples from Best Practices Learning Sites:

◊ **Choose a topic that will attract community interest.**

Community advisors in Woodridge, Illinois, decided that of all potential topics, diversity would appeal to the greatest number of citizens.

◊ **Use languages other than English.**

Organizers in Aurora, Illinois; Hartford, Connecticut; and Inglewood, California, conducted some study circles in Spanish; organizers in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, used an interpreter for study circle members from the Hmong community.

◊ **Select a location that works.**

After experiencing difficulties with first-round locations in Fort Myers, Florida, organizers designated more sites in neutral locations (i.e., schools, libraries) to attract and keep the second-round participants.

◊ **Provide incentives for participants.**

Child care, transportation, food, and extra credit for students helped boost participation in some communities.

◊ **Maintain good databases.**

In Fayetteville, North Carolina; New Castle County, Delaware; and Colorado Springs, Colorado, organizers compiled and maintained lists that included race, gender, age, and other community diversity factors. These lists helped programs to set and reach targets for specific populations.

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Community profiles

Alread, Arkansas

Calling the Roll: Study Circles for Better Schools

The study circle program in rural Alread began in 1998 in response to the statewide Calling the Roll project, which promoted the use of local study circles to address education issues. The core committee that organized the effort was carefully selected to reflect Alread's diversity — people from different churches and geographic parts of the community, newcomers and "back-to-the-landers." Members capitalized on bonds of friendship, kinship, and shared faith to bring in participants from every segment of the community. Nearly 100 people — one-quarter of Alread's population — participated in the first round of study circles on education. In 1999, Alread organizers developed their own guide on character education for a second round of study circles.

Aurora, Illinois

Aurora Community Study Circles

In 1995, organizers at the Aurora YWCA initiated a study circle effort to support the YWCA mission of eliminating racism. In 1997, Aurora Community Study Circles separated from the YWCA and became an independent 501(c)(3) organization with two part-time staff members. Central to the success of this program has been the commitment and steady involvement of a diverse advisory board and community partners who provide support, enhance recruiting capacity, and lend credibility to the effort. More than 2,500 people have participated in Aurora's quarterly study circles on race. Two projects now operate under the Aurora Community Study Circles umbrella: Circles of Understanding (for adult participants), and Many Young Voices, an ongoing teen dialogue program designed to foster understanding of racial and ethnic issues; MYV participants have created their own web site as part of the project.

Maine

In Maine, dozens of rounds of study circles have taken place since 1991 on a variety of topics, including abortion, education reform, environmental priorities, and substance abuse. An early alliance between the Maine Council of Churches and the *Portland Press Herald/ Maine Sunday Telegram* promoted the citizen conversations to a broad audience. Over time, the productive alliance expanded to include other media partners, including public and commercial television and radio stations. Researchers estimate that over 10,000 people have taken part in study circles in Maine. Maine also pioneered a program to train youth to facilitate study circles with their peers. Funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, more than 4,000 youth have taken part in study circles. The Maine Council of Churches and the independent organization it created, The Roundtable Center, have promoted study circles across the state as a way to foster a new kind of conversation on public issues.

New Castle County, Delaware

Study Circles on Racism and Race Relations

The YWCA of New Castle County initiated a study circle program in 1996 to address the part of its mission aimed at eliminating racism. Organizers also saw this as a proactive way to ease long-standing racial tensions in the community. The YWCA has engaged nearly 100 community partners in the effort. A number of organizations, including the *News Journal*, have worked to attract and sponsor high-profile speakers featured at well-publicized kickoff events. Organizers have also partnered with local private and public schools, and conducted workplace circles. A total of 3,750 people had taken part in study circles on race, as of May 2001. The program has generated a number of action efforts, including the "Reaching Youth Task Force," which has conducted a round of study circles on race at a local middle school. More than 300 students participated in this program.

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IV. Contributing to Change, Particularly in the Area of Race

Best Practices from Experienced Programs:

1. Practices that helped programs contribute to personal change as a result of study circles:
   - Make each individual circle as diverse as possible.
   - Make the facilitation as skilled as possible.
   - Make explicit the program's goal to bring about changes in individuals.

2. Practices that helped programs contribute to positive changes in organizations:
   - Achieve genuine, working diversity in the coalition.
   - Give every organizational partner a clear job to do.

3. Practices that helped programs contribute to changes in institutions and communities:
   - Pick the topic carefully and promote the circles in a way that suggests an expectation of community and institutional change.
   - Include in the coalition people who can help accelerate community and institutional change.

Programs that incorporated some of these best practices are profiled at the end of this section: Fort Myers, Florida; North Little Rock, Arkansas; and the state of Oklahoma.

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Ways Study Circles Contributed to Individual Changes

People reported that study circles on race changed them personally. Some changes were subtle, and others — particularly the changes in European Americans — were dramatic. Most of the personal changes fell within four categories:

- Better informed about differences, people became aware of their communities in new ways.
- People gained courage to take more direct stands for racial equity and against racist statements and actions.
- People formed stronger attachments to their own community and became more willing to invest in it.
- People formed new relationships across racial and other divides.

Ways Study Circles Contributed to Changes in Institutions and Communities

The most extensive reported changes were those affecting communities and institutions. People identified four types of change in several larger arenas:

Changes in community images and symbols

Communities created inclusive new celebrations and changed existing celebrations to make them more inclusive of people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Changes that affected groups within the community

Programs secured improvements in retail shopping for African-American people; relationships developed between governing bodies and specific groups of citizens who typically do not participate in public life and public decision making.

Changes that had a ripple effect

Changes that began with a small group of people over time became more pervasive and reached others: Systematic planning processes and other community-building efforts became more open and inclusive.

Changes in institutions and systems

Some changes had a wide radius and affected large numbers in a community, including those who had not participated in study circles: People attributed important changes to study circles, including impacts on elections, more equitable, inclusive newspaper coverage and changes in state laws.

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Case Study:

Study Circles as a Vehicle for Change

Maria Velazquez-Constas talks about Fayetteville, North Carolina

Maria Velazquez-Constas, a Latina woman, is the founder of the Latino Center and the former chair of the Human Relations Commission in Fayetteville. She was a key study circle organizer.

"In any program that you start and you have different people involved, there's a lot of conflict. I was named the chair of the Human Relations Commission at the time when the whole group was talking about study circles . . . the project fell on my lap. The beginning was very difficult, because the community was ready for change, but at the same time, there was resistance. Two organizations wanted to do a lot, and when you have two organizations or two people that want to do a lot, they step on each other's toes. But we worked those things out very well.

I think that because of the topic we had a lot of newcomers coming, like the Latino group, the Korean group, some Japanese and Indians in the working group. Everybody wanted to have a say into the race problem in Fayetteville. What sparked it was the death of two black people, but the other groups in the community wanted to say, "It's not just black and white, you know," and they participated.

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From the study circles recommendations, several activities that involve both the county and the city have made this community better. When I started at the Commission, we had a committee called the County-Wide Human Relations Commission. There was not much interest. When the recommendations came out of study circles, the politicians began to listen. They were saying, "Wait a minute, the community wants this. It's not just a group of the Human Relations Commission, or a committee of the Human Relations Commission, that wants this. It is the community that is recommending it." Study circles were the vehicle for change.

"Wait a minute, the community wants this. It's not just a group of the Human Relations Commission, or a committee of the Human Relations Commission, that wants this. It is the community that is recommending it."

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Organizing For Changes Related to Race

Examples from Best Practices Learning Sites

Study circles can contribute to several forms of work on race. Programs that addressed race contributed to various types of change. Whether the aim is to increase awareness or take action, to improve race relations or end racism, the work fares better when coalitions decide on their program's particular focus and make that focus plain in the program title, promotion, and facilitator training.

Improved race relations through increased awareness

◇ Individuals reported increasing their knowledge of people different from themselves. In Fayetteville, North Carolina; Lima, Ohio; Hartford, Connecticut; Twin Cities, Minnesota, and other places, people reported that they themselves or fellow citizens had changed their views or increased their understanding of people who were different in terms of race, culture, religion or ethnic background.

Improving race relations by taking action

◇ Organizations and institutions opened formerly closed doors. In Decatur, Georgia, the community's strategic planning process for the first time intentionally included people of color in each major task force.

Working to end racism by increasing awareness

◇ In Hartford, Connecticut, and Syracuse, New York, people reported talking about white privilege in their study circles and becoming aware of it in a new way.

Working to end racism by taking action

◇ In Springfield, Illinois, the city government agreed to change its hiring practices in the police and fire departments. Participants in the first round of study circles there had identified unfair practices in these two departments as a priority issue for the city to address.

Community profiles

Fort Meyers, Florida

Lee County Pulling Together

Study circles in Fort Myers came about in 1997 in response to a national study that identified Fort Myers as the most residentially segregated city in the South. Concerned citizens and community leaders created an independent, 501(c)(3) organization — Lee County Pulling Together (LCPT) — to organize a study circle program that would bring people of different racial backgrounds together to work on race relations. Nearly 600 people participated in two rounds of study circles on race. At the action forum following the first round, participants formed eight permanent action councils, each co-chaired by a white person and a person of color. The study circles generated resources and renewed interest in building a shopping center in an under-served, predominantly black community in Fort Myers. In 2001, LCPT began using study circles to address the issue of police-community relations.

North Little Rock, Arkansas

Calling the Roll:
Study Circles for Better Schools

As participants in the 1998 statewide research effort, Calling the Roll, North Little Rock organizers produced one round of study circles on the topic of education. These circles engaged 174 parents, students, teachers, school board members, and other citizens in discussions aimed at gathering public input on issues of education. Most participants attended the action forum along with the superintendent, school board members, and central administrators in the school system. The school board and central administration responded positively to participants' recommendations and began making some immediate changes, including televising board meetings and summarizing the meetings in a one-page report for the public. The board also used recommendations to identify its priorities and a structure for addressing them. School board members and the school district administration made the decision-making process for the district more accessible to members of the community.

Oklahoma

Balancing Justice/Calling the Roll:
Study Circles for Better Schools

As one of two statewide efforts included in the study, Oklahoma hosted two rounds of study circles in 1996-1998. State staff members of the Oklahoma League of Women Voters and local League volunteers organized the effort, focusing first on the criminal justice system and later on education. For the round on Balancing Justice, 1,000 people from 13 communities participated. Participants included legislators, judges, sheriffs, and many citizens concerned about the corrections system in the state. The magnitude of the program created a climate for change, and the Legislature passed a measure completely revamping the criminal justice system. The second round of study circles on education, Calling the Role, drew 500 participants in 10 communities.

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V. Linking Dialogue With Action

Best Practices from Experienced Programs:

1. Develop sound tools for initiating action.
   - Write action guides.
   - Hold action forums that promote linkages with existing organizations and change efforts.
   - Encourage participants to make recommendations to government and other decision-making bodies.
   - Organize and conduct events that promote action.
   - Develop benchmarks for measuring the impact of actions.
2. Develop good approaches to sustain long-term action.
   - Form permanent action task forces or work groups.
   - Hire staff to support action efforts.
3. Tell participants what the program's expectations are regarding action.
4. Develop coalition frameworks and organizational structures that support both dialogue and action.

Programs that incorporated some of these best practices are profiled at the end of this section: Decatur, Georgia; Hartford, Connecticut; Inglewood, California, and Woodridge, Illinois.

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About Action Forums

Action forums help participants start taking action in the community. Most Best Practices learning sites held at least one action forum. Organizers shared experiences about action forums, and researchers added insights based on input from multiple communities.

- Action forum planning takes a lot of effort and energy.
- Many programs invite the entire community to the action forum.
- Most action forums feature reports or recommendations from individual study circles, or from a few if the round is very large. Many also feature a dynamic keynote speaker. Some set aside time to create new action task forces or action councils.
- Action forums seem to work best in small to mid-size communities.
- Programs creating action forums after each successive round of study circles have needed to modify their approach to account for other factors (i.e., ongoing action councils formed during earlier forums).
- Some action forums have concentrated on linking study circle participants with existing action efforts, not launching new ones.
- Savvy programs set the date, plan and promote the action forum from the beginning of a round of study circles.
- Skilled organizers tell participants what kind of support will be available for actions taken after the forum.

Different Expectations for the Pace and Scale of Change When Addressing Race

In communities where study circles have addressed race, the researchers found that the expected pace and scale of change varied greatly. They also found conflicting views on the ability of study circles to move beyond the personal or interpersonal to address institutional racism. Coalitions must learn about differing viewpoints and work to understand their bases. Here are some strategies organizers might use to address differing expectations for action and change:

- Think strategically about your program's appropriate focus for change — personal, organizational, or institutional — and from the start, clarify this focus for participants.
- Incorporate the focus of change into your program's name. For example, if you focus on interpersonal change, consider using the term "race relations" in the title. If you focus on systemic change, consider using the term "institutional racism" in the title. If you focus on multiple levels of change, use multiple terms in the title.
- Engage citizens in inquiry, deliberation and dialogue in open, inclusive forums about possibilities for action and change.
- Inform participants of any actions taken as a result of study circles, especially if changes occur on an institutional level.
- Build a shared understanding of institutional change and how to make good judgments about when to have patience as beneficial change unfolds slowly and when to press harder against institutional resistance.
- Support participants in action councils working on institutional changes.

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Case Study:

Study Circles and Change

Bill Pollard talks about Syracuse, New York

Bill Pollard, an African-American man, is on the advisory committee and former co-chair of the advisory board in Syracuse. He is a professor of social work and an administrator at Syracuse University.

"I became involved because I was asked by the right person. The executive director of the InterReligious Council made a case in a way that I could not refuse. She asked me and basically caused me to decide that I had to put up or shut up on my concern about racism. In other words, I could not talk about racism as an inherent evil in this community and not be involved in some way of addressing it.

I was not as enamored with the idea of action immediately because I thought that in this community, it was as important to have the dialogue as it was to do something, and that at many levels, the dialogue is more important than action in other places. For me, some vestiges of racism can never be resolved by some kinds of action. For example, racism played out as a result of our inability to respect another human being because he or she looks different; there's nothing the community can do to take action against that. That has to come from within.

If you choose to ignore me as a person of color when you walk down the street by refusing to give me eye contact, by ignoring my smile of hello and good morning and looking in the other direction — if you choose to do that, I don't know what action the community can take to change your heart and mind. But if I have the opportunity to listen to you and have you listen to me, I may learn in the process that you've got this irrational fear. Perhaps I might be less willing to get upset when that happens to me.

Racial and ethnic disparities ultimately are based upon our ignorance of one another. In study circles, people can probe, in a structured way, and seek understanding of one another across the various racial and ethnic and gender groups."

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Tools for Sustaining Action

Best Practices from Experienced Programs:

Programs that committed to long-term support of action efforts relied on at least one of three strategies. These strategies were not tied to any particular organizational structure; however, sustained action requires sustained resources. All these examples come from programs that have some paid staff.

Permanent action generators: In Syracuse, New York, organizers structured and empowered the program's permanent decision-making body (the Community Wide Dialogue Advisory Committee) to form ad hoc action task forces whenever they are needed. Advisory committee members are chosen, in part, for their ability to help accomplish action on identified issues. Action task forces formed so far: one that addresses retail racism in a large mall, and one that works on racism in mortgage lending.

Permanent action groups: In Fort Myers, Florida, eight action councils began after the first round of study circles in 1997: Education; Strengthening Lee County Pulling Together (LCPT); Economic Development; Media; Special Events; Government; Research; and Community Awareness. A member of the LCPT Steering Committee serves as a liaison to each council.

Permanent action staff: In Hartford, Connecticut, organizers added a full-time staff person in 1999 whose job is to provide guidance, encouragement, training and support for the fledgling action efforts there.

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Community profiles

Decatur, Georgia

Decatur Roundtables

The study circle program in Decatur began in 1998 as a way to address mounting concerns around neighborhood issues and school district matters. Working with SCRC, Decatur organizers developed a discussion guide on the topic of neighborhoods, and growth and development. Strategic efforts — including a door-to-door campaign to recruit African-Americans and assure them they would have a voice in neighborhood issues — were successful. Of the 450 people who took part in the Roundtables 20 percent came from the black community. Some participants reported that the Roundtables gave them their very first experience of discussing race relations with a group of people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The action teams and follow-up work that grew out of the Roundtables are alive and ongoing, as part of the city's strategic planning process. In September 2001, Roundtable participants addressed education concerns, including issues around space allocation and redistricting.

Greater Hartford, Connecticut

MetroHartford Community Conversations on Race

A 1997 report of the MetroHartford Millennium Project indicated that racial and ethnic divisions were directly linked to economic conditions, and that failure to address these divisions would result in failure to achieve a community vision making Hartford one of the top ten places to live and work in the United States. In response, leaders from the Office of the Secretary of the State, the National Conference for Community and Justice, the Aetna Foundation, DemocracyWorks, and the Millennium Project joined forces to develop a regional study circle program. Nearly 2,000 people participated in four rounds of study circles, from 1998 until 2001, most in work settings. Noting the difficulties that action groups faced in planning and carrying out their work, DemocracyWorks created a full-time staff position to support action efforts emerging from the study circles. Action groups have worked to expand the study circles to new geographic areas and new populations. Other action initiatives include: developing a written tool to help nonprofit organizations form more diverse boards; increasing voter registration, and promoting neighborhood and youth study circles.

Inglewood, California

Improving Education

In Inglewood, a community where 91 percent of the residents are people of color, approximately 600 parents, educators, and other concerned citizens participated in one round of study circles on education (1997-1998). The superintendent mandated participation by all 20 schools in the district. As part of its own strategic plan, each school implemented its own study circle program, designing the program to suit the community it served. Organizers promoted the program and conducted the circles in Spanish and English. Relationships among parents of different racial and ethnic backgrounds improved immediately, as did relationships between parents and the schools. The study circles yielded long-term benefits, as well.

Parents and community members who took part gained a better understanding of education issues and worked to help pass Measure K, which made $131 million available for improvements to school facilities.

Woodridge, Illinois

Where Cultural Diversity is Our Strength

Late in 1997, the Ecumenical Council in Woodridge and the DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference expressed concern about how the Village of Woodridge was dealing with increasing diversity in the community. In response, local government organized a coalition — with representatives from the schools, fire districts, parks, Ecumenical Council, public library, and churches — and provided the support to produce a round of study circles on diversity in the Fall of 1998. One hundred and twenty people took part. The schools played a major role, doing the bulk of the recruiting and providing most of the facilitators for the circles. Organizers encouraged participants to identify action steps that needed to be carried out by local government, civic organizations, and businesses, and the Village administration took responsibility for getting that information to the appropriate bodies so that they could work on the recommendations.

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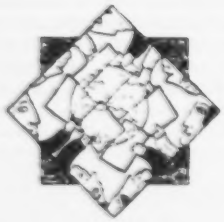

Appendix A

About the Research Team

Vivian Elliott is an African-American woman who grew up in Michigan. She is an independent consultant with Elliott Service Systems, Inc., in Denver, Colorado. Vivian now works extensively in bringing equitable policies, practices and perspectives into teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment in school districts throughout the United States. Contact Vivian at vivelliott@aol.com.

Kristin Houlé, a European-American woman, worked as a research analyst for Roberts & Kay, Inc., in Lexington, Kentucky. Kristin grew up in various communities throughout the United States and Canada. She is a graduate of the University of Kentucky. Kristin now serves as the program associate for Amnesty International USA's Program to Abolish the Death Penalty, based in Washington, D.C. Contact Kristin at kristinhoule@hotmail.com.

Steve Kay, A European-American man, is partner at Roberts & Kay, Inc., a firm dedicated to advancing democratic practices in work places and communities. Steve grew up in a Jewish family in Lawrence, Massachusetts. He works extensively as a researcher and facilitator on complex community change, typically involving many different views and interests. Contact Steve at steve@robertsandkay.com.

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Biren "Ratnesh" Nagda is a South Asian man, of Indian descent, who grew up in Kenya, East Africa. He is currently an associate professor of social work at the University of Washington, Seattle, and the director of the Intergroup Dialogue, Education and Action Training and Resource Institute. He developed the intergroup dialogue model with colleagues at the University of Michigan while doing a doctorate in social work and psychology. His teaching and research interests focus on cultural diversity and social justice, intergroup dialogue, and multicultural- and empowerment-oriented social work practice with individuals, groups, and organizations. He has published widely on multicultural and social justice education, multicultural organization development, and intergroup dialogues in educational and community settings. He received the 2001 University of Washington Distinguished Teaching Award, and the University of Washington School of Social Work 2003 BASW Students' Choice Teaching Award. Contact Ratnesh at ratnesh@u.washington.edu.

Rona Roberts is a European-American woman who grew up in rural Kentucky. She is partner at Roberts & Kay, Inc., and served as the project manager for the "Best Practices" study. Rona is in her twenty-fourth year of work as a researcher, writer, and adviser for organizational and community change. Contact Rona at rona@robertsandkay.com. Roberts & Kay, Inc., also has a web site: www.robertsandkay.com.

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This guide is a manual for study circle organizers and facilitators.

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